

"As usually happens in the throes of a major snowstorm, people end up with unexpected house guests" said Diane Griffin of the Island Nature Trust in her newspaper release of February 3rd. Such was the case for many Islanders between January 30th and February 6th, 1992. These feathered guests appeared under cars, in a cattle feed trough, on black ice on roads, in the middle of lawns, under bird feeders, and on snow banks. For many observers, this was their first sighting of the Dovekie, a starling sized seabird normally seen as a rare visitor near the Island's coast in autumn with occasional winter sightings. These birds normally winter in open water off Newfoundland and Nova Scotia but they are often reported by the sharp-eyed observer in autumn if strong winds force them near the shore or into estuaries and bays.

Robie W. Tufts, in his book Birds of Nova Scotia, notes that "Dovekies are notoriously liable to being driven, often in large numbers, far outside their normal winter range by storms.....Quite at home on the broad ocean, Dovekies drift about in winter, feeding on the plankton that is everywhere abundant when weather conditions are favorable. However, when very rough weather strikes, this minute marine life sinks to low, inaccessible levels, causing a serious food shortage for the Dovekies when storms are prolonged."



The severe snowstorm that started January 30th and blew itself out on February 3rd was the cause of this winter's record number of sightings.

Although some of the birds appeared to be in poor condition and died shortly after people picked them up, others took a variety of foods when offered and subsequently flew away. Many others were seen along roads and other locations and flew away when humans approached them.

The following sightings were received by the Island Nature Trust, P.E.I. Fish and Wildlife staff, or myself:

- a) Dovekies were seen at the Mount Stewart Railway Bridge on Jan. 30 and some were still there Feb. 6. One was driven into Louanne Walsh's yard by crows. It ate a bowl of Cheerios then was released and flew into open water at the main bridge in Mount Stewart;
- b) 1 was found with its bill frozen on Feb. 1 in Southport (Irene Reddin). She took it into her basement as it was very weak, fed it crumbs, and let it fly out after it started flying; another was found by Gerald Wagner in Freeland and it, and 4 others he gathered up, took crab meat when offered over a 4 day period;
- c) On Feb. 2: 1 flew away from a driveway at Lockeshore Road (June and Steve Homans); 1 flushed from a lawn on Hurry Road at 10:10 a.m. (Keith Pigot); 1 single and a flock of 13 were seen flying low over fields and calling at Brackley Beach (Scott Makepeace); 1 was rescued from a dog on the Green Bay Road at Riverdale and remained a guest until Feb 3. (Jackie Waddell); 1 was seen at DeSable (Brenda Penak); 1 blew in on the storm to a feeder at Belmont (Harvey Morris); Carol MacKinnon tried to feed one oats, bread, and barley after finding it at LeFurgery Subdivision at Wilmot. It made